

The Power of Sound

By Reverend Jaganath Carrera

The Power of Sound

Sounds have the power to create or destroy. The soothing rhythm of waves washing on the shoreline calms our tattered nerves while the screech of metal on metal causes us to cringe. Yogis have understood and worked with sound for thousands of years for healing, for uplifting the mind, and for tuning in to the higher, Divine Wisdom.

Mantras

Certain sounds, called mantras (literally, that which protects the mind), are used by yogis to clear, calm, and strengthen the mind. They can bring healing to the body and harmony in an environment. Mantras are not just made up words used as labels for objects. They are not part of the language. They are the subtle vibratory essence of things, experienced by great sages in deep meditation and presented as sounds that can be repeated. Mantras are ideally suited to serve as objects of meditation. The vibratory power of the mantra enhances the meditative experience.

The ability of a mantra to help bring about a transcendent state is so powerful that sound is equated with the creative force in the universe in many traditions. The Bible declares, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”* (John, 1.1) The Rig Veda, one of the most ancient scriptures in the world, contains a similar passage, *“In the beginning was Brahman (God) and with Brahman was sabda (primordial sound) and sabda was truly the Supreme Brahman.”*

You can choose a mantra for yourself. *Hari OM* and *OM Shanti*, are two examples of powerful mantras that can help any seeker. There are also books and CDs that have lists of mantras. Students could pick a mantra based on trial and error, or because it is associated with a particular deity with whom they feel a strong connection. For example, *OM Namah Shivaya* is a mantra connected with Lord Siva. However, since the word *siva* represents auspiciousness, the repetition of this mantra is not restricted to devotees of Lord Siva. Mantras transcend these designations. Their fundamental benefit derives from their vibration, not associated ideas or images. The tradition of mantra repetition is not limited to the Sanskrit language and Yoga. Recitation of powerful sounds or prayers such as *Shalom*, *Maranatha*, and *Ave Maria*, are used in many spiritual traditions.

Some students receive a mantra from a Guru or adept in whom they have faith. Often, the mantra is given as part of the process of initiation (diksha), in which the student enters into a Guru/disciple relationship. At initiation, a mantra is given along with a transmission of spiritual energy to enliven the mantra and give the initiate a powerful and enduring boost to their practice.

Whichever path a student takes in finding the mantra for them, the underlying foundation is the same: faith. In the first case, trust in their own ability to choose, in the latter instance, they put their faith in a master to choose for them. The student is still making the essential choice in both scenarios. Whether you pick a mantra yourself or have one

given to you, once you have a mantra, you generally make the best progress if you stick to it for life.

OM

Although there are many mantras, the source of all mantras is OM (rhymes with home). Most, but not all mantras contain OM as part of their structure. OM is the hum of the business of Creation: the making, evolving and dissolving of beings and objects. You can hear it in the roar of a fire, the deep rumble of the ocean or the ground-shaking rush of a tornado's winds. OM is always vibrating within us, replaying the drama of creation, evolution and dissolution on many levels. This hum can be heard in deep meditation, when external sound is transcended and internal chatter stilled.

From Sri Swami Satchidananda:

We should understand that OM was not invented by anybody. Some people didn't come together, hold nominations, take a vote, and the majority decided, "All right, let God have the name OM." No. God manifested as OM. Any seeker who really wants to see God face to face will ultimately see Him or Her as OM. That is why it transcends all geographical, political or theological limitations. It doesn't belong to one country or one religion; it belongs to the entire universe.

It is a variation of this OM that we see as the "Amen" or "Ameen," which the Christians, Muslims and Jews say. That doesn't mean someone changed it. Truth is always the same. Wherever you sit for meditation, you will ultimately end in experiencing OM or the hum. But when you want to express what you experienced, you may use different words according to your capacity or the language you know.

How to Work With Mantras

Mantra repetition is a simple, powerful, and direct way to attain deeper meditative states. The technique is simple:

- It's a good idea to prepare the mind for mantra repetition by doing some yogic breathing practices and some affirmations or chants. This should make up about 1/4 - 1/3 of the total time in your meditation session.
- The mantra can be said out loud, with only lip movement, or mentally. Out loud is easiest, but not as powerful as with lip movement. Repeating a mantra mentally is the most powerful, but is a little harder to do.
- Generally, have the pace moderate, not too fast or too slow.
- Try to make each repetition count. Try to hear each syllable. Don't change the tune.
- If your mantra has "n" or "m" sounds, emphasize them a little. This helps bring the vibration up to the higher centers of consciousness and stimulates the pituitary and pineal glands.

- Keep your mind in the present. Think you are repeating each mantra just once . . . then just once . . . then just once . . .
- Combine the mantra with the natural flow of the incoming and outgoing breaths. The syllables of the mantra can be divided any way to suit your taste. Don't alter the breath to fit the mantra. Follow the rhythm of the breathing.
- You can combine repetition of your mantra with visualization of its letters at the heart or third eye area, or with your attention at one of the higher charkas (the heart or above)
- When the mind wanders, let go of the distracting thought and gently refocus on the mantra.
- Repeat your mantra continuously from the beginning to the end of your session.
- Try to have two sittings a day of 20 minutes.
- End with prayers or chants for the peace and well being of all beings and all creation.

You can also bring your mantra with you during the day. Repeat it as you walk, ride the train, chop vegetables, or sweep the floor. Use it to send healing, comforting vibrations to those in need, or to help center your own mind in any stressful situation.

Mantra repetition is not the mindless parroting of a sound, but an attentive act set against a background of enthusiasm. For keen seekers, each and every repetition is a moment of connection with the Self, an affirmation of the Truth of their own spiritual identity and a reminder of their intentions.